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COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME AND COORDINATION
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Agenda item 3

DRAFT REPORT

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Addendum

UNITED NATIONS REFORM: MEASURES AND PROPOSALS (item 2 (b))

PROGRAMME QUESTIONS: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1998-1999 (item 2 (a))

1. At the 32nd meeting, on 14 October 1997, the Controller introduced the report on the programmatic and financial consequences of the Secretary-General's reform proposals described in document A/51/950 (A/52/303).

2. The Committee was informed that the report (A/52/303) described the changes that would be required to the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 consequent upon the Secretary-General's reform proposals. The Committee was also informed that the General Assembly was in the process of reviewing the Secretary-General's reform proposals contained in document A/51/950.

3. The Committee was further informed that the programmatic and financial consequences of the reform proposals were primarily, in the view of the Secretariat, of an organizational nature and that all programme mandates addressed in the initial programme budget proposals would continue to be implemented. Where programmes were affected, namely those implemented by the former Departments for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis and Development Support and Management Services, and now integrated into the new Department of Economic and Social Affairs, details of the integrated programme activities had been provided.

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4. The Committee was informed that the creation of the position of a Deputy Secretary-General, as well as the proposed establishment, merging or dissolution of departments and other organizational units, were part of an overall strategy to ensure a more effective and better managed Secretariat.

Discussion

5. One delegation stated that the purpose of United Nations reform should lie in enabling the United Nations to respond effectively to the dramatically changing context of the international environment in which the United Nations was expected to function in the twenty-first century. United Nations reform should be carried out in a comprehensive and balanced manner as a whole, so as to ensure a revitalized and viable Organization capable of meeting the many challenges. Such comprehensive and balanced reform should be constructed on three pillars, that is, reform in the political area, including the Security Council, reform in the economic area, especially on development, and reform in the financial area, focusing on how truly fair and equitable methods of financing the activities of the Organization are to be realized. While supporting the major part of the Secretary-General's reform proposal in general terms, that delegation stated that the creation of a revolving credit fund was not acceptable.

6. Many delegations expressed serious concern and reservations about some of the Secretary-General's proposals, which, in several cases, went beyond the relevant mandates approved by the General Assembly when adopting the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001. In that regard, those delegations expressed the view that the reform measures and proposals must be fully consistent with the medium-term plan, which constitutes the principal policy directive of the Organization. The main objective of the reform measures and proposals should be to enable the United Nations to implement fully all mandated programmes and activities.

7. Many delegations expressed deep regret that persistent questioning of the efficiency, role and mandate of the Committee for Programme and Coordination obstructed progress in the work of the Committee and prevented the adoption of substantive recommendations and conclusions. They expressed the view that the Committee, in accordance with its mandate and terms of reference, indeed had a role to play in reviewing and clarifying the programmes reflected in the programme budget, giving particular attention to programme changes proposed by the Secretary-General. Those delegations stressed that they saw no contradiction in the consideration of the programmatic implications of the reform proposals of the Secretary-General by the Committee and the consideration of those proposals by the General Assembly.

8. Some delegations expressed support for the Secretary-General's reform proposals as a package. They stated that discussions in the Committee should not cut across work currently under way in the General Assembly. They made clear that they had no wish to hold up the work of what they saw as an important committee, whose discussion, they said, could make an important contribution. They expressed their view that it was not for the Committee at this stage to challenge specific aspects of the proposals, but rather, it was the Committee's

role to comment on and clarify only the programme implications of the Secretary-General's reform proposals to his proposed programme budget. They noted that this view applied equally to all sections of the Committee's report.

9. One delegation noted that the Organization had been in an almost constant state of reorganization and financial difficulties since 1987, and that this had affected the preparation, approval and implementation process of the budget.

10. One delegation emphasized that the reform could not be reduced to an exercise of cost diminution. It has to strengthen the United Nations as an active and effective world forum, which also implies efficiency, transparency, responsibility and credibility. As every reform project, this one has its merits and shortcomings. The current negotiations of the reform project have to make prevalent the advantages and reduce the adverse effects.

11. Many delegations expressed disagreement with the proposals relating to the creation of a number of high-level posts at a time when the Organization continued to face an unprecedented financial crisis. They also stressed that there were no convincing programmatic justifications for the upgrading of some posts to higher levels, and requested the Secretary-General to review his proposals regarding those posts.

12. A number of delegations expressed concern about the decrease in the number of lower-level posts while there was an increase in the number of high-level posts. They were also of the view that the reduction in the number of posts should not have an adverse effect on the delivery of activities, nor should the reduction in administrative costs impair the work of the Secretariat. In that regard, some delegations requested the Secretary-General to refrain from reducing the proportion of entry-level posts at the P-1 to P-3 levels for budgetary purposes in accordance with General Assembly resolution 51/226.

13. A number of delegations expressed regret that the Secretary-General had already issued bulletins announcing changes to the Secretariat structure which contradicted relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, particularly resolution 51/219; in that regard, those delegations stressed that such changes required prior approval by the Assembly. Other delegations were of the view that organizational changes were within the authority of the Secretary-General as chief administrative officer of the Organization.

14. Many delegations stressed that the Secretary-General is the chief administrative officer of the Organization. Moreover, those delegations further stressed that any reform measures that did not require General Assembly approval should be implemented within the framework of the existing legislative mandates. Action on any measures and proposals set out in document A/51/950, unless decided otherwise, should be implemented without prejudice to existing resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly or of other intergovernmental bodies.

15. One delegation expressed the view that the Charter of the United Nations and the General Assembly gave the Secretary-General certain authority that must be respected. The same delegation further stated that while the Secretary-General should pay due attention to the views of Member States as he implemented

his reform plans, the General Assembly did not have the authority to deny the Secretary-General the right to proceed with implementing the reform proposals, which fell within his authority as chief administrative officer of the United Nations. Many delegations enquired about the legislative mandates for some of the actions being implemented by the Secretary-General which, in their view, did not exist.

16. One delegation stressed that the Secretary-General's reform proposals were constrained to the General Assembly's decision on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999. That delegation concluded that the authority of the Secretary-General had its limits vis-à-vis the role of the General Assembly as established in the Charter regarding the budgetary process.

17. Many delegations reaffirmed the functions and powers of the General Assembly in accordance with the Charter and stressed that any reform proposal that might have programmatic and/or financial implications, including those related to the restructuring of the Secretariat, must be considered and approved by the General Assembly.

18. Several delegations noted that the proposal to establish a development account would require revisions to the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations.

19. One delegation stressed that all sections of document A/52/303 should have been in the same programme format as the one used in section 7A, for consideration by the Committee.

Conclusions and recommendations

20. The Committee recommends to the General Assembly, when considering the reform proposals of the Secretary-General, to take into account the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, which is the principal policy directive of the United Nations.